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Contributed photo/Libby Albers  
Dean Nestor, right, gets some help installing a bat box in Herman Hill Park as part of his Eagle Scout project. The bats eat mosquitoes, helping to control the insects.

## ‘Bat Man’ completes Eagle Scout project

By Jim Emrick

In Clearwater his Eagle Scout project could earn him the nickname of Bat Man.

Dean Nestor’s Eagle Scout project was both an effort in conservation and education -- about bats.

“Originally I was just going to plant a tree for my Eagle Scout project. But my mom is into all of this science stuff and convinced me to build the bat boxes and put them up where a lot of people would be because the bats eat a lot of mosquitos,” Nestor said about building eight bat habitats for his Eagle Scout project.

Bats are known for eating their weight in insects each night. With bats having a five-mile radius, a bat house full of bats would eat up a lot of mosquitos.

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The bat habitat project started in June 2004 and was completed in October.

Nestor contacted the Bat Conservation International group in Austin, Texas. He initially wanted to put bat boxes up at the soccer fields where he and his dad and sister play soccer “because that’s where everyone is getting eaten alive by mosquitos.” That turned out to be too ambitious because Nestor chose to build the nursery colony box, which is a bat box that is built for female bats to go into and have their babies.

“I jokingly called it the Hyatt Hotel for bats. It’s not just a little box, it has three layers and exterior plywood and special features. These habitats are well suited for the Mexican Free Tail Bat or The Little Brown Bat.

“Both are found in Central Kansas,” said Nestor’s mother Katy Nestor who helped her son with the bat habitat project. Katy is a science teacher at Goddard High School.

Nestor said Kansas is part of the bats’ natural migration path and there are not a lot of places for the bats to roost. So the idea of building bat boxes was to give them a place to live for four or five weeks before they move on.

Most of the wood for the boxes was donated by Timber Products. Some of the materials were purchased from B&B Lumber.

“Basically I just had a few friends over and we built the habitats in my garage,” Nestor said. The boxes are 3 feet tall and 6 inches wide.

Eight bat boxes were made.

“We placed the bat houses where they would be in a bat’s natural environment and they would help others out by eating the mosquitos that may have the West Nile Virus,” Katy Nestor said.

One was placed south of Goddard High School at the outdoor wildlife learning site. Katy’s sister teaches chemistry at Wichita Heights High School so a bat habitat was placed at the school’s outdoor wildlife learning site. Three bat habitats were placed just south of Vulcan Chemicals where the wetland areas are being restored.

One box was placed at the Girl Scout Camp at Starwoods Outdoor Center in Clearwater. A box was placed at the Clearwater soccer field, and a habitat was placed at the

Wichita Water Center at Herman Hill Park at Pawnee and Broadway.

“The more bat boxes we put out, the more people asked to have one placed in other places. The habitats are quite elaborate to build. It took a lot of effort to build the habitats, but it was a great Eagle Scout project,” Katy Nestor said.

No one knows for certain if any bats have moved into the habitats.

“Bats are very finicky like Purple Martins. Sometimes you put up houses for Purple Martins and no birds move into them for a year, and if you change them just a little bit they might move in the next year,” Katy Nestor said.

Nestor, who had his Eagle Scout Court of Honor last February, said he is proud of his Eagle Scout project and that he believes he accomplished what he set out to do with the project.

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“The project was all about making an effort to create a safe environment for the bats as they migrate through the area. It also was about educating people about the role bats play in our environment and the good that they do,” Nestor said.

Nestor will be a junior at Clearwater High School this fall. He is the son of Michael and Katy Nestor, Clearwater.